

Causes of World War I

The **Causes of World War 1** or **The Great War** (1914 to 1918) deals with assertions of immediate responsibility for the outbreak of this large scale, fratricidal military conflict in which between nine and thirty million people died as a result.^[1] This page concentrates mainly, but not exclusively, upon the chronology of what took place following the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand^{[2][3]} with some background relating to alliances.



The Emperors of Germany and Austria

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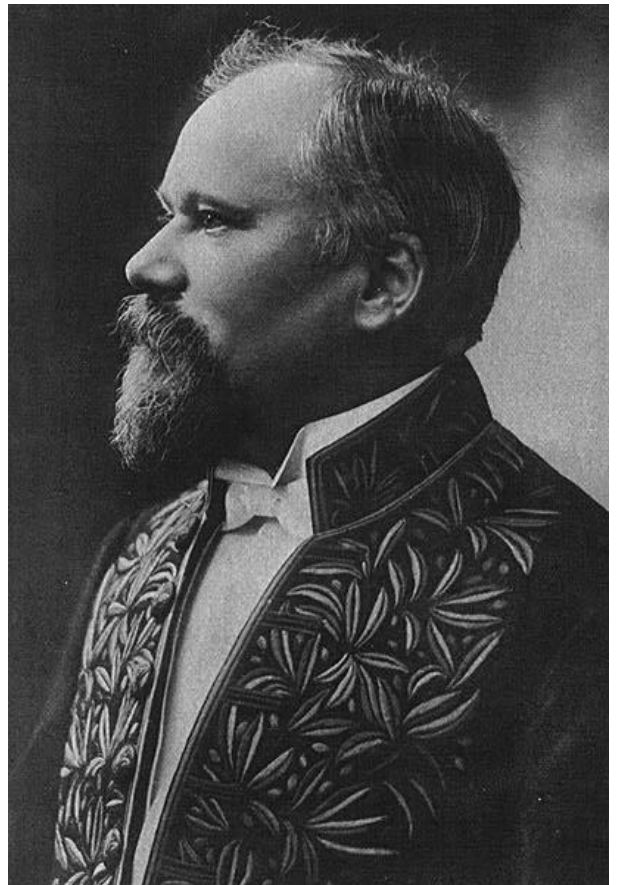
Mobilisations

Mobilisation IS war! - French General Raoul de Boisdeffre to Tsar Alexander III in 1894, to which the Tsar replied *That is as I understand it.*^[4] Present was the Russian Chief of Staff, Nikolai Obrutchev, who stated that Russian mobilisation ought to be followed by "immediate action, acts of war" or an "offensive". Boisdeffre added in a further Note: To order general mobilisation...would mean acting as the aggressors in Europe."^{[5][6]} Tsar Nicholas II received

Boisdeffre twice when he visited France. In an *Urgent Telegram* of the German Chancellor to the Imperial German Ambassador in Paris on 31 July 1914 concerning the full Russian mobilisation, he states "mobilisation inevitably implies war".^[7]

Bullet-point chronology for 1914:

- 28 June Murder by Serbian Gavrilo Princip of the Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his consort.
- 20 July Russian Empire orders secret partial mobilisation.
- 23 July Austria-Hungary serves ultimatum on Serbia for the regicides.
- 24 July France tells Russia it would stand by their military alliance.
- 24 July Serbia orders full mobilization of its army.
- 25 July Serbia rejects Austro-Hungarian Ultimatum.
- 25 July Austria-Hungary orders partial mobilisation against Serbia.
- 25 July Russia orders partial mobilisation of 13 Army Corps against Austria-Hungary.
- 26 July Russia orders a "Period of Preparation for War".
- 28 July Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia (7 p.m.)
- 28 July Russia orders mobilisation in all European Russia [aimed at the Central Powers].
- 29 July Russia mobilises all military districts bordering Austria-Hungary and Germany.
- 29 July France reiterated their support to any action initiated by Russia.^[8]
- 29 July France orders partial mobilisation.
- 29 July Germany makes detailed proposals to Belgium for 'benevolent neutrality' and compensation for military transit.
- 29 July Belgium orders partial mobilisation in response.
- 30 July Montenegro orders mobilisation (in support of Serbia).
- 30 July Russia orders full mobilization of army and navy throughout the empire (4.p.m.).
- 31 July Austria-Hungary orders full mobilisation (at midday) "as a purely defensive measure against Russia".
- 31 July Germany declares a state of "threatening danger of war".
- 31 July Germany serves ultimatum on Russia to demobilise. Russia refuses and a state of war came into effect.
- 1 August France orders full mobilisation (4.p.m.).
- 1 August Germany orders full mobilisation (5 p.m.).
- 2 August Russian troops cross German frontiers at several points.
- 2 August Germany serves ultimatum upon Belgium to permit its troops to cross part of that country. Refused.
- 3 August Germany declares war on France following border violations by French troops on Aug 1st & 2nd.
- 3 August Germany declares war on Belgium following border violations there by French troops.
- 3 August Italy declares she will "remain neutral in a European conflict" and withdraws from the Triple Alliance.
- 3 August Romania declares she will remain neutral despite her treaty obligations with the Central Powers.
- 3 August Great Britain orders full mobilisation.
- 3 August Ottoman Empire signs Treaty of Alliance with the German Empire.
- 4 August German army invades Belgium heading for France.
- 4 August Great Britain declares war on Germany after an ultimatum to evacuate Belgium is refused.
- 10 August Great Britain and France declare war on Austria-Hungary.
- 15 August Two entire Russian armies invade Germany (East Prussia).
- 23 August Japan declares war on Germany (attacks Tsingtau 4 days later).
- 12 October Ottoman Empire declares war on Triple Entente.



President Poincare of France

- 5 November Great Britain declares war on Ottoman Empire.

Allies

The Allied Entente Powers included Serbia, Montenegro, the Russian Empire, France, Belgium, the British Empire, Japan, and (from April 1917) the United States and (from August 1917) China^[9]. Also Italy (May 1915) and Romania (27 August, 1916) who both broke their treaties with the Central Powers joined the Allies.^[10]

Central Powers

Opposing them were the Central Powers, which included the Austro-Hungarian and German Empires, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire.

Background

"Before 1914 [Western] Europe had enjoyed a prolonged period of general peace, attaining a degree of wealth and civilisation unrivalled in the past.....Europe was happy and prosperous".^[11]

Pre-War Ethnic rivalries & alliances

One of the goals of the foreign policies of the European Great Powers in the pre-war years was to maintain the so-called 'Balance of Power' in Europe. This evolved into an elaborate network of secret and public alliances and agreements. In 1871 there was no system of alliance in existence. However in the 1879 **Dual Alliance**, a purely defensive treaty, was signed between Germany and Austria-Hungary (which Germany in 1909 reconfirmed by declaring that Germany was bound to stand with Austria-Hungary even if it had started a war). Italy joined this pact in 1882 and it thereafter became the Triple Alliance.^[12] That was followed by the France-Russia treaties 1891-1894.

Germany had no arguments with any country and wished to remain in that position. They wanted peace.^{[13][14]}

A Balkan war between Serbia and Austria-Hungary was considered by some inevitable, as the Pan-Slav movement^[15], which was motivated by ethnic and religious loyalties, and a rivalry with Austria dating back to at least the Crimean War period, grew and became more aggressive.^{[16][17]} The rise of ethnic nationalism, particularly the 'Greater Serbia' movement, where anti-Austrian sentiment was perhaps most fervent, fuelled matters in this region. The increasing Serbian nationalist sentiment also coincided with the decline of the Ottoman Empire. After the new Balkan nations had practically pushed Turkey out of Europe, the next target was inevitably Austria-Hungary.^[18] The Balkan League had been partly organised by the energetic and formidable Baron Nicholas Hartwig, who, as Russian Ambassador in Belgrade from 1909, had worked tirelessly to undermine Austria-Hungary and promote Pan-Slavism under Russian patronage.^{[19][20]}

After the defeat of the Turks, Austria-Hungary had in 1878 occupied the former Ottoman province of **Bosnia-Herzegovina**, which had a large Serb minority population. It was subsequently formally annexed as part of Austria-Hungary in 1908. Despite the model administration given to the two provinces over the 30 year period, they were open to destabilisation by neighbouring Serbia.^[21] In 1903 the relatively pro-Austrian Serbian ruling dynasty, the Obrenovics, were brutally murdered in a *putsch* by Serbian Officers, and the pro-Russian Karadjordjevic family were installed in their place. The latter were far more robust in pursuing a 'Greater Serbia' expansionist policy, and encouraged closer ties with Russia, which supported the Pan-Slav movement.^[22] "Russia financed the Pan-Slav movement, especially using Serbia as their instrument, subsidising the Serbian press and its offices for that purpose."^[23] Yet in the Second Balkan Wars of 1912, Austria-Hungary "by its loyal and disinterested attitude gave Serbia a chance to become nearly twice the size it was before".^[24] German Chancellor Bethmann-Holweg wrote: "Serbian mischief-making goes back over a long term of years. The Greater Serbia chauvinism appeared in

particularly marked form during the Bosnian crisis. The Greater Serbia propaganda has since been continually increasing in extent and intensity under the very eyes of official Serbia and with its tacit consent. This propaganda has led to the latest outrage [the assassinations]."^[25]

Italy had joined the Dual Alliance in 1882, with caveats to account for Austro-Italian rivalry, transforming it into the **Triple Alliance**. The alliance provisions were strengthened in 1911 following the Libyan war. Italy, however, refused to enter the Serbian war with them in 1914, changing sides the next year to the Allies who had secretly promised them Austrian territory. **Romania** also failed to honour its separate alliance treaty with the Central Powers, and instead joined the Allies who had secretly offered them territories at their neighbours' expense, in Hungary^[26] and Bulgaria.

France, smarting from its humiliating defeat by German forces in the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, and her loss to the German Empire of Alsace and Lorraine, which France had then occupied for 300 years, helped create a sentiment of irredentist revanchism in that country.^[27]

They found an ally in **Russia**, who was actively pursuing a Pan-Slav policy opposing Austria-Hungary in the Balkans and in her Slav provinces.^{[28][29][30]} Russia also sought, as a foreign policy objective, the conquest of Constantinople and control of the Straits.^[31] Discussing the latter in 1912, Russian Minister Grigorii Trubetskoy said the time was not yet right then for "a move on the Straits, as it might trigger an Austrian advance into the Balkans and this would be fatal for Slav interests. To sacrifice Slav interests in this way would be morally unacceptable but also contrary to Russia's need to emerge from the Balkan Wars as leader of a united Balkan Bloc" against the Triple Alliance.^[32] This position had changed by 1914 when, in the famous secret conference in St. Petersburg, 21 February - 6 March 1914, it was pointed out that "a struggle for Constantinople was not possible without a general European War".^[33] Nitti, who took part in the Versailles treaty deliberations, wrote: "Russia was the real and underlying cause of the world-conflict. She alone promoted and kept alive the agitations in Serbia and of the Slavs in Austria."^{[34][35]} Fabre-Luce too states that "Pan-Slav intrigues played a preponderating role in unchaining the war".^[36] "Sazanov (Russian Foreign Minister) and his associates wanted to set up a range of Russian satellite-states in eastern Europe: an independent Bohemia, enlarged Serbia, semi-independent and enlarged Poland, and to assert Russian control of the Dardenelles."^[37] (Ironically these were the same ambitions Stalin wanted and largely realised some 30 years later.)

Russia and France signed a "diplomatic agreement" in 1891, a military convention the following year, and a treaty of military alliance in 1894. In 1912 France and Russia concluded a naval convention.^[38] These treaties ended for good the previous co-operation between the great conservative Powers of the East: Russia, Germany and Austria.^[39] Germany in particular saw a great danger in Russia "and the continual increase in the Russian army was her gravest pre-occupation.....Germany never believed in a French danger."^[40]

Britain, following the Franco-Prussian war, was in favour of a strong Germany, against England's traditional enemy, France. After Germany began to increase its strength, which included a 'place in the sun' with colonies, plus increasing the size of its navies, both merchant and the *Kriegsmarine*, the British attitude cooled. Whilst Britain negotiated an alliance with Japan in 1902, but had no treaties at that point with Russia. Following Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War three years later, British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, negotiated the Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907 which ended the long dispute between the two powers over influence in Persia. Egged on by a Russophile Ambassador, Arthur Nicolson, in St. Petersburg from 1906-1910, the British Foreign Office increasingly saw the Balkans through Russian eyes. During the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina 'crisis' in 1908, Sir Edward Grey supported the Russian point of view.^[41] However, on 12 May 1914, upon representations of the Russian Ambassador Count Alexander von Benckendorff in London, that Britain should enter into a formal alliance with the Russian Empire, Sir Edward Grey replied that he did not consider it possible.^[42]

Great Britain had entered the *Entente Cordiale* with France (primarily an arrangement over colonial questions^[43]) in 1904, and "military agreements" with France in 1905-6^[44] but there were no formal and binding agreements for military co-operation between Britain and anyone else.^[45] In 1914 Sir Edward Grey told the Russian Ambassador "As you see, we have no [military] alliance today, even with France."^[46] "Britain was also opposed to any offensive war

against Germany provoked by Russia or France."^[47] On 24 July 1914, in a telegram to de Bunsen, British Ambassador at Vienna, Sir Edward Grey relates that he had told the Austrian Ambassador in London that: "The merits of the dispute between Austria and Serbia are not the concern of His Majesty's Government." On July 24th Sir George Buchanan, British Ambassador to Russia told their Foreign Minister, Sazanov, who with the French Ambassador was pressing for British support, that "direct British interests in Serbia are nil, and a war on behalf of that country would never be sanctioned by British public opinion."^[48] On July 30th the London *Times* newspaper described the crisis "as a specifically Slavonic question concerning only Serbia, Russia, and Austria". The Russian Ambassador in London, Count von Benckendorff, telegraphed his Foreign Office in St. Petersburg on July 31st that "the British public, and even Parliament, regard the question as exclusively Slav".^[49] As late as 29 July 1914, during the pre-war crisis, Sir Edward Grey told French Ambassador Jules Cambon that "our idea has always been to avoid being drawn into a war over a Balkan question".^[50]

In 1914 Britain announced she would only formally enter the war if there was a violation of Belgian territory, of which she (with France and Prussia) was a guarantor^[51]. This followed on from the confidential Minute written in 1908 by Lord Hardinge, then Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, when he said: "Supposing France violated the neutrality of Belgium in a war against Germany it is, under present circumstances, doubtful whether Britain or Russia would move a finger to maintain Belgian neutrality, while, if the neutrality of Belgium were violated by Germany, it is probable that the converse would be the case."^[52]

When The Great War broke out, these treaties determined who entered the war and on which side.

Arms Race

The cost of modernising and new armaments was felt by all the Great Powers in Europe. The total arms spending by Britain, Germany, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy increased by 50% between 1908 and 1913, inflated greatly by naval budgets.

Alfred Thayer Mahan's thesis was that a strong navy was vital to 'great nation' status, and this appears to have been shared by the European great powers, **all** of whom had naval expansion plans in action. Following Russia's defeat at the hands of Japan in 1904-5 and with the rapid advances in armaments, particularly warships and their design, the Great Powers began modernising all aspects of their military capabilities. Britain at this time had the world's largest navy. The so-called naval race between Britain and Germany was intensified by the 1906 launch of HMS *Dreadnought* a revolutionary vessel whose size and power, notably the centre-line positions of its heaviest guns, which had rendered previous battleship designs partially obsolete. American author David G Herrmann^[53] viewed the shipbuilding rivalry as part of a general movement in the direction of war. This does not appear to be borne out in the diplomatic records: In a letter to the Russian Foreign Minister Iswolsky on 19 June 1909, on the visit of England's King Edward to Berlin, The Russian Ambassador, Count Nikolai Osten-Sacken, reported King Edward said to Kaiser Wilhelm that he "considered the excitement of British public opinion and the press concerning



The 1st new Austrian dreadnought battleship, the *Tegetthof* (launched 1912).

the increase of the German fleet as 'ridiculous'. You have the vote of assent of the Reichstag for the programme which you decreed necessary for the naval forces of Germany and you must carry out this programme."^[54] In fact in 1900 the British assigned a relatively low priority to the 'German threat', and instead persistently feared French naval power.^[55] Count Max Montgelas also demolished the naval arguments as myth, and historians Niall Ferguson and Christopher Clark argued Britain's clear ability to maintain an overall naval lead signified this was not a factor in the oncoming conflict.^[56]

In 1913 a fresh naval agreement was concluded between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy in reaction to the significant increase in French naval strength in the Mediterranean.^[57]

Following Imperial Russia's defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1904, she lost interest in that part of the Far-East, and reverted her attention to the Balkans and the Straits (Constantinople).^[58] From 1907 Russian rearmament was stepped up. By 1910-12 Russia was committed to the creation of powerful and modern fleets in the Baltic and the Black Sea. In 1912 France and Russia concluded a new naval convention.^[59] Costly projects to re-equip and modernise fortresses on the frontier with Germany, as well as to acquire new weaponry, inflated the defence budgets. By 1913 Russia was fully committed to the arms race, in part dictated by international pressures, but first and foremost by the need to placate France.^[60]

Preliminary Plans

The thesis adopted by many is that the mobilization of Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, Belgium, Great Britain and Germany (in that order), automatically triggered the conflict. Modern but left-wing German author Fritz Fischer emphasized what he saw as the inherently aggressive nature of the German Schlieffen Plan, which considered a two-front strategy. However, almost all European Empires and countries had common borders with another, and all High Commands, since Napoleonic times, had extensive strategic plans of action in place if a war was declared. **Germany**, in order to avoid a two-front war, would therefore have to eliminate one major opponent quickly, before taking on the other. They had drawn up the Schlieffen plan as a fast moving strategy, based on Clausewitz's argument that attack can be the best defence.^[61] Germany did not want to risk all the terrain problems they encountered during the Franco-Prussian war^[62], thus giving France time to organise. The plan therefore called for a strong right to either pass through or seize Belgium and cripple the French Army by pre-empting its mobilization. The Germans, heavily outnumbered, realised that once the Russian army had mobilised Germany would stand little chance of winning. Her only chance was to knock out France before the Russian army had begun its march west. After the attack, the German Army would rush east by railroad and quickly destroy what was expected to be slowly mobilizing Russian forces. It was not thought that any other plan offered Germany the chance of success. A defensive action on the two fronts could only lead to a long throttling of Germany.^[63]

France meanwhile had concluded a pact, in 1892, and a military alliance with Russia in 1894.^[64] In addition France spent hundreds of millions of Francs on a series of supposedly impregnable fortresses (i.e: Verdun), and by subsidising Belgium's construction of similar fortresses (i.e: Leige) to complement their own. Their principle line of movement was to be into the disputed provinces of Alsace and Lorraine which had been restored to Germany in 1871, and where the only fortifications were old (Metz). They would rely upon the 'Russian Steamroller' to relieve them of any German pressure in wartime.

Russia: With the French as long-standing partners in their conspiracy^{[65][66]} against the Central Powers^[67], Russia foresaw a mobilization of its armies against both Austria-Hungary and Germany (and also the Ottoman Empire) along a huge front, and in this respect France financed vast loans to the Imperial Government for armaments and a string of new railways all heading towards the German and Austro-Hungarian frontiers.^[68]

All these plans created an atmosphere in which speed was going to be one of the determining factors for victory. Elaborate timetables were prepared; once mobilizations had begun, there was little possibility of turning back. Also, the plans of France, Russia, & Germany (but not Austria-Hungary) were based upon some form of offensive, in clear

conflict with the modern improvements of defensive firepower and entrenchment.

Anti-Imperial Propaganda

It has been argued that aristocrats and military élites had too much power in Empires such as Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary, and that war was a consequence of their desire for armed forces and disdain for democracy.^[69] This theme figured prominently in anti-German sentiment propaganda.^[70] Consequently, supporters of this theory, and republicans, called for the abdication of rulers such as Kaiser Wilhelm II, as well as an end to aristocracy and militarism in general. This platform provided some justification for the entry of the USA into the war when revolution hit the Russian Empire in March 1917, as the USA had been vocally anti-Tsarist. American President Wilson hoped the League of Nations and disarmament would secure a lasting peace after the war. He also said that variations of militarism, in his opinion, existed within the British and French Empires.

However this was a propaganda myth as Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy were by 1914 all democracies with representative parliaments. The Ottoman, alone of the Empires, remained autocratic.

Opposition & Support for the War

Some Jewish political activists, both of the Bolshevik and Zionist variety, favored the war seeing it as an opportunity for the destruction and breakup of empires. Vladimir Lenin asserted that imperialism was responsible for the war. He drew upon the economic theories of Karl Marx. The trade union and socialist movements, controlled by Communists and their fellow-travellers, had long voiced their opposition to a war, which they argued, meant only that workers would kill other workers in the interest of capitalism. Once war was declared, however, the vast majority of socialists and trade unions backed their governments. The exceptions were the Bolsheviks *en bloc*, the Italian Socialist Party, and individuals such as Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and their followers in Germany. There were also small anti-war groups in Britain and France. Other opposition came from conscientious objectors - some socialist, some religious - who refused to fight. In Britain 16,000 people asked for conscientious objector status. Many suffered years of prison, including solitary confinement and bread and water diets. Even after the war, in Britain many job advertisements were marked "No conscientious objectors need apply". Many countries also jailed those who spoke out against the conflict. These included socialist activists Eugene Debs in the United States, and Bertrand Russell in Britain.

English economist John A. Hobson, had predicted that unlimited competition for expanding markets would lead to a global conflict; and Cordell Hull, later the American Secretary of State under Franklin Roosevelt, a free-trader, believed that trade barriers were the root cause of both World Wars. In 1944, he had significant input to the Bretton Woods Agreement to reduce trade barriers and eliminate what he saw as the cause of the conflicts.

The famous British historian, Niall Ferguson, told the *BBC History* magazine in Feb 2014 that he believes Britain made a terrible mistake in joining the First World War.^[71]

July Crisis and Declarations of War

The Prophecy

In February 1913, following Serbian provocations, Austria-Hungary's Chief of Staff, Conrad von Hoetzendorf, proposed a war to crush Serbia. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand angrily objected:

If we attack Serbia, Russia will support her and we shall have a war with Russia. Should the Russian Tsar and the Austrian Emperor push each other off their thrones in order to open the road for revolution?^[72]

The Assassination

On the 28 June 1914, Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb^[73] failed student, assassinated the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife, in Sarajevo, Bosnia. Princip was a fanatical member of the Black Hand, a group whose aims included (article 1) "the union of all Serbs" and the organisation of revolutionary activity "in all lands inhabited by Serbs".^[74] Investigations proved that the head of the Intelligence Department of the Serbian General Staff, Colonel Dimitrijević, a leading member of the "Black hand" had arranged the whole thing in Belgrade.^[75]



Archduke Franz-Ferdinand and his wife leave Sarajevo Town Hall shortly before their murders, 28 June 1914.

The Austrian Consul at Nish, Serbia, Herr Hoflehner, telegraphed Count Berchtold in Vienna on 6 July 1914: "The news of the terrible crime at Sarajevo created here a sensation in the fullest sense of the word. There was practically no sign of consternation or indignation; the predominant mood was one of satisfaction and even joy, and this was often quite open without any reserve, and even found expression in a brutal way. This is especially the case with the so-called leading circles - the intellectuals, such as professional politicians, those in education, officials, officers, and the students. Commercial circles adopted a rather more reserved attitude. All explanations made by Serbian circles or individual higher personalities purporting to give expression to indignation at the crime and condemnation of it, must have the effect of bitterest irony on anyone who has had the opportunity, during the last few days, of gaining an insight at first hand into the feelings of educated Serbian people....as one who has long been accustomed to the expressions of political fanaticism here, I feel the greatest depression."^[76]

The British *Blue Book* stated: "no crime has ever aroused deeper and more general horror throughout Europe, none had ever been less justified.....Austria was under provocation."^[77]

"Greater Serbia propaganda has been continually increasing in extent and intensity.....it is to the account of that propaganda that the latest outrage, the trail of which leads to Belgrade, can be charged."^[78]

Serbia & Russia prepare for war

Russia was the real and underlying cause of the world-conflict. She alone promoted and kept alive the agitations in Serbia and of the Slavs in Austria.^[79]

The German Chancellor had been made aware from intelligence reports that the French Ambassador in St.Petersburg had advised Paris by telegram at 11.35 p.m. on July 20, 1914 that "the Russian Government had decided to take the first steps towards general mobilisation secretly." The German Chancellor therefore telegraphed the Russian Foreign Minister the following day: "We would emphasise that the problem, in our view, is solely for Austria-Hungary and Serbia to solve, and one which it should be the earnest endeavour of the [Great] Powers to confine to the immediate participants."^[80]

On July 21, Count Pourtalés, German Ambassador in St.Petersburg, had an extensive interview with Sazanov, Russian Foreign Minister, who stated "that Russia would not be able to permit Austria-Hungary to make any threats against Serbia or to take any military measures."^[81]

The Austro-Hungarian government, as a great European power, were outraged by the assassination of the heir-apparent to their throne and his consort, and served an ultimatum on Serbia on July 23 with numerous demands, compliance with would mean an acceptable peace. Austria insisted it had no wish to compromise Serbian sovereignty.^[82] Austria's Count Berchtold, "in an attempt to show good intentions toward Russia", told Prince Koudacheff, Russia's Minister in Vienna, that he "regarded the stability of Russia as a necessary factor of European policy; that the monarchies of Europe should show a solid front in their united opposition to Serbian policies conducted with a revolver and with bombs."^[83]

Serbia rejected the Austrian ultimatum^{[84][85]} and, relying on the 'blank cheque' guaranteed support by Russia, ordered full mobilization of its army at 3 p.m., on July 24, "directed exclusively against Austria"^[86] (reported that night to be "in full swing"^[87]). Russia's Foreign Minister, Sazanov, told the British, French and Romanian Ambassadors over lunch at the French Embassy the next day that Austria-Hungary's ultimatum to Serbia "means war!"^[88] Sir George Buchanan replied "if Russia mobilised. Germany would not be satisfied with counter-mobilisation, but would probably declare war at once."^[89]

That was followed by Austria's partial mobilisation of eight Army Corps ^[90] against Serbia^[91] on the evening of the following day. On the same day the German Ambassador at Paris wrote to the Imperial Chancellor: "it cannot be expected that Russia could remain indifferent to the humiliation of a Slav nation."^[92] That was followed by a telegram of Sir Edward Grey in London to Sir Horace Rumbold in Berlin in which he said: "The immediate danger is that in a few hours Austria might march into Serbia, and Russian Slav opinion [would] demand that Russia should march to help Serbia."^[93]

Predictably, the Pan-Slav Russian Press became exceptionally excited (notably the *Russkii Invalid*)^[94] calling for immediate Russian mobilisation.^[95] notwithstanding that it is generally accepted that mobilisation means war. The Russian Ministerial Council, presided over by the Tsar, had already decided upon partial mobilisation of thirteen Army Corps against Austria-Hungary on July 24.^[96] These measures were conveyed to Paris, where the Russian Ambassador, Paléologue, stated that the Russian General Staff said "war had been a certainty since the 24th July", when France had assured Russia that she "would fulfil all the obligations of her military alliance". In a speech at Krasnoje the following day Tsar Nicholas stated "Russia would have to stand by her racial companion and could not tolerate Serbia being crushed....A war between Austria and Serbia is a war with Russia."^[97] Russia ordered a "Period of Preparation for War" for the whole Empire on July 26, on which day Sir George Buchanan, British Ambassador in St Petersburg, telegraphed London: "Russia being sure of support by France will face all the risks of war." General Joffe later wrote that he and the French War Office were "delighted" that their covert war measures had so far been carried out without a hitch.

On the same day the Russian Minister of War told the German Military Plenipotentiary at the Russian Court that "Russia has to stand by her racial companion; we would be breaking faith with our history if we did nothing....A war between Austria and Serbia is a war with Russia."^[98] The German Chargé d'Affairs at Bucharest telegraphed the German Foreign Office on July 27th: "Influential Pan-Slavic and Serbophile parties are so strong it is feared the Tsar may become undecided."^[99]

Prince Troubetzkoi, "one of the most influential men at Russian Headquarters, and of the Tsar's *entourage*, told the German Military Plenipotentiary at the Russian Court, on July 28th, that "the Serbs are our Slavic brothers and we cannot leave our brethren in the lurch."^[100] On the same day preparatory mobilisation measures in European Russia were reported from numerous diplomats across Russia.^[101]

In a telegram to the German Emperor on July 29, the Russian Tsar referred to the Austro-Serbian crisis and "the indignation in Russia, *shared fully by me*, is enormous. I foresee that very soon I shall be overwhelmed by the pressure brought upon me, and be forced to take extreme measures which will lead to war." He asked the Kaiser to "stop your ally from going too far." The Kaiser passed this telegram to the Foreign Office with his comments, in which he accused

the Tsar of "an attempt to put the responsibility on my shoulders" and refers to "Pan-Slavic" interests at work. He adds that "instead of summoning us to check our allies, His Majesty should turn to the [Austrian] Emperor Franz Josef and deal with him."^[102]

The London *Times* newspaper on July 31st described the war agitation in progress as "a specific Slavonic question" and Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador in London, telegraphed St. Petersburg on the same day saying "the public and even Parliament regard the question as exclusively Slav."^[103]

Fabre-Luce states that the Russian mobilisation[s] was the "decisive event" leading to war. He also states that the 'Versailles Verdict' "entirely ignores the evidence of the mobilisations."^[104]

Germany attempts to avoid war

A prophetic telegram was sent on 18 July 1914 by the German Ambassador at Constantinople, Wangenheim, to the Foreign Office in Berlin: "People are already talking here about the Austrian *démarche* at Belgrade. [Italy's] Margrave Pallavicini thinks a new alliance of Turkey with Austria is a good idea. I oppose this idea most actively. Turkey is today without any question worthless as an ally. She would only be a burden to her associates, without being able to offer them the slightest advantage. Turkey should be advised to keep away from every political adventure and to maintain friendly relations with all nations. Even a neutral Turkey would detain several Russian corps on the Armenian border." This telegram was forwarded on by Berlin to Vienna.^[105]

Meanwhile the German Government appeared to still think that matters could be dealt with without a war^[106], and frantic efforts were made in this respect.^{[107][108]} Examples of the German position are thus:

On July 20 Prince Lichnowsky, German Ambassador at London had a meeting with British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, who stated to the ambassador that "he hoped that the Austro-Serbian quarrel might be settled and localized, for the idea of a war between the Great Powers of Europe must be repelled under all circumstances."^[109]

On July 21st Sir Horace Rumbold, British Charge d'Affaires in Berlin, had a discussion with the German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The latter stated "the question at issue is one for settlement between Austria and Serbia alone, and there should be no interference from outside." He considered it inadvisable that the Austro-Hungarian Government should be approached by the German Government on the matter.^[110]

On July 22 the Imperial Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, telegraphed (from his country seat) the German Foreign Office that he was as yet unacquainted with the contents of the Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia, and that he regarded as premature a recall of the German Fleet from its annual manoeuvres.^[111]

On July 22 von Jagow, Secretary of State at the German Foreign Office wrote to the Chargé d'Affaires at Hamburg: "In view of the outbreak of an Austro-Serbian crisis it is earnestly to be desired that the German press should punctually assume the attitude adapted to our interests. The first aim of German policy is that of localising the struggle....Our great economic interests are dependent on the maintenance of peace."^[112] The next day von Jagow telegraphed the German Minister at Stockholm (there had been anti-Russian agitation going on in Sweden for about 18 months): "To guide your conferences: According to all appearances, Austria-Hungary, who feels her existence to be threatened by the Greater Serbia agitations, is going to make very serious demands on Belgrade. These demands are not [yet] known to us; we regard them as part of Austria-Hungary's internal affairs, which it would not become us to attempt to influence. In case Serbia should refuse to accept the demands, an Austro-Serbian conflict might impend. We earnestly desire that such a conflict should remain localised."^[113] The same day von Jagow telegraphed the German Ambassador in London: "We are not acquainted with the Austrian demands. We regard the settlement of the Austro-Serbian dispute as an internal matter to be arranged exclusively between both participants and as one on which we should exercise no influence; and we have, therefore, exercised no influence on the decision of the Vienna Cabinet."^[114]

The German Kaiser Wilhelm II told von Jagow on July 23rd that the Austro-Serbian matter was "none of my business" and that he would "not meddle in anything the Emperor Franz Josef is alone competent to judge!"^[115] However, the Kaiser, upon learning of the Austrian partial mobilisation against Serbia on the 24th, immediately telegraphed Tsar Nicholas II emphasising that Austria had only partially mobilised, and only against Serbia.^[116]

As the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Belgrade had been closed, when war between Austria and Serbia appeared imminent von Jago telegraphed on July 24th the German Legation, who had agreed to look after Austro-Hungarian affairs there, that any declaration of war on Serbia was *not* to pass through the German Legation. "Our standpoint has to be that the quarrel with Serbia is an Austro-Hungarian internal affair in which it would no more become us to mix than it would others, and for that reason we are advocating the localization of the conflict. Only if Russia should intervene would we be drawn into the conflict."^[117]

On July 26th the Imperial Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, telegraphed the German Ambassador at St.Petersburg: "mobilisation [by Russia] would mean war, which, furthermore, would have to be waged [by us] at the same time against Russia and France, as, of course, we are acquainted with France's obligations to Russia. We cannot believe that Russia is willing to unchain such a European war" and urged the Ambassador to impress upon the Russians the importance of localization and mediation.^[118]

At 9.19 p.m. on July 27 the German War Ministry telegraphed the German Military Attaché in St Petersburg: "No military measures are contemplated here. But we note that the (Russian) frontier guard is already mobilised, and that steps are being taken to close the frontier. Therefore request constant watch to be kept on Russian military measures and report." The following day Emperor Wilhelm II sent a note at 10 a.m., to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, von Jagow, saying "There is no reason for war." Von Moltke records that this Note was communicated at once to the Chief of the German General Staff. On the same day the German Government, through Herr von Schoen, declared "Germany was ready to work with the other powers for the preservation of peace."

Germany's Imperial Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg telegraphed his Ambassador in Paris on July 29th: "We must hold fast to the position that the Austro-Serbian conflict concerns those two nations alone and we are not in a position to mediate between them. We can however mediate between Russia and Austria."^[119]

Bethmann-Hollweg made urgent "let us decrease the tension" appeals to Paris, over French preparations for war, and to St Petersburg, on the afternoon of the 29th, which were met with evasive responses. The Chancellor asked the British Ambassador in Berlin to convey to London Germany's regret that the Austrian Government had rejected the British proposal for negotiations with Serbia, which Berlin had supported.

The German Emperor had meanwhile telegraphed the Austrian Emperor on the same day: "I could not see my way to refuse the Tsar's personal request that I should undertake to mediate with a view to averting a general conflagration and maintaining peace, and I have submitted proposals to your government through my Ambassador yesterday and today."

On July 31 the German Ambassador Count Pourtales was received by Tsar Nicholas when he "begged the Tsar, if it were possible in any way, to check or to revoke Russian mobilisation" to which the Tsar replied "for technical reasons that was no longer possible".^[120]

On August 1st the German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, von Jagow, urgently telegraphed his Ambassador at Paris: "We want and contemplate no hostile action against France, despite their mobilisation. We are speaking with [England's] Sir Edward Grey and shall keep you informed".

Austria declares war on Serbia

With the Serbian rejection^[121] of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum, that empire declared war on Serbia, "in order to compel the Serbian Government to comply with the demands in full and establish guarantees for future good behaviour", at about 7 pm on July 28, 1914.^[122] The Serbs immediately appealed to Russia "the protector of Serbia" to "severely punish" Austria-Hungary.^[123] In response, Sazanov, "arguably the leading exponent of Pan-Slavism in the Russian government"^[124], and their Foreign Minister, now urged the "necessity of general mobilisation without further delay". (Notwithstanding that partial mobilisations had been under way in Russia some time before this).

On July 30th **Montenegro** mobilised against Austria-Hungary.^[125] That evening, the Austrians were still only *considering* partial mobilisation for their Russian frontier, their Government having telegraphed St.Petersburg that "Austria really wishes to reach an understanding with Russia". However the next day, following receipt of intelligence reports, Austria-Hungary felt forced to announce full mobilisation "as a purely defensive measure".

On July 31st Austrian Foreign Minister Count Berchtold telegraphed his Imperial and Royal Ambassador in London to say that Austria-Hungary wanted to express their readiness to consider Sir Edward Grey's proposition to mediate between Austria and Serbia, despite Russia's mobilisation against Austria-Hungary. "Our acceptance, however, is subject to the condition that our military action against Serbia shall nevertheless proceed, and that the British cabinet shall induce the Russian Government to stop its mobilisation against us. In this case we would at once cancel our defensive military counter-measures in Galicia, forced upon us by Russia's mobilisation." A further telegram to all Imperial and Royal Embassies, Legations and Consulates the same day stated: "These measures [full mobilisation] are of a purely defensive character and are solely due to the pressure of the Russian mobilisation, which we greatly regret, as we have no aggressive intentions whatever against Russia, and desire the continuation of friendly relations."^[126]

Russia

On July 29, Russia mobilised by Imperial *Ukase* all the military districts on the Austrian frontier and generally against Austria-Hungary and Germany.^[127] Germany advised London that if a Russian offensive against Austria occurred Germany would be obliged to respect her defence treaty obligations as Russia could engage 55 infantry divisions whereas Austria-Hungary could only raise 22 because of the reserves in place for action against Serbia. On the same day France announced partial mobilisation, and the German General Staff minuted that they were feeling uneasy in a *Memorandum* to their Imperial Chancellor, that Russia already has twelve Army Corps on the German frontier and were making great "military dispositions". Further reports came from Paris one of which states that "the French General Staff were surprised at Germany taking so few protective measures."

At 3 p.m. on July 30, Russian Minister Isvolsky's response to the calls for further negotiations were: "we cannot comply with Germany's wishes, and have no alternative but to hasten with our military preparations and assume war is inevitable."

On July 30, after the Russian General Staff informed the Tsar that continuing partial mobilization was logistically impossible, a full mobilization of army and fleets was ordered throughout the Russian Empire.^[128] The German Ambassador at St.Petersburg telegraphed the German Foreign Office that his Military Attaché reported vast troop movements and trains carrying them West, which he said had commenced as early as the 29th July. On July 30th Sir George Buchanan, British Ambassador in St.Petersburg, telegraphed to London that "full Russian mobilisation would inevitably lead to a European war"; while Britain's Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey, said that suspension of the Russian mobilisation was "the only chance of preserving peace".^[129]

On July 31 the German Chancellor telegraphed the Imperial German Ambassador at St.Petersburg: "In spite of negotiations still pending and although we have up to this hour made no preparations for mobilisation, Russia has mobilised her entire army and navy [against Austria-Hungary], hence also against us. On account of these Russian measures we have been forced, for the safety of the country, to proclaim a 'threatening state of war', which does not yet

imply [our] mobilisation. Mobilisation, however, is bound to follow if Russia does not stop every measure of war against Austria-Hungary and us within 12 hours and notifies us definitely to this effect. Please communicate this *at once* to M.Sazonov [Russian Foreign Minister] and wire the hour of communication."^[130]

Germany

The Austrian Emperor Franz-Josef telegraphed the German Emperor on July 31 to say that he had reluctantly ordered the mobilisation of his entire armed forces, including the navy, following the Russian full mobilisation against his Empire.^[131]

The Germans, who had continued to hope for peace, were now being inundated with military intelligence reports of Russia and France preparing to attack them, and declared on July 31 a state of "threatening danger of war", a pre-mobilisation step.^[132]

The German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs subsequently served upon the Russian Ambassador at Berlin an extensive note for the Russian Government under the terms of the Hague Convention^[133]: "While Germany, striving since the commencement of the crisis to find a peaceful solution, was still continuing upon orders from her August Sovereign, its role of mediator between Austria-Hungary and Russia, you have proceeded to the full mobilisation of all your land and sea forces. Obviously the security of the German Empire is now menaced by this extreme measure which had not been preceded in Germany in similar measure. Our request to His Majesty the Emperor (of Russia) to stop this mobilisation for war (served by ultimatum of 31st^[134]) having been declined, His Majesty the Emperor, my August Sovereign, declares that he accepts the war which is forced upon him."

The full German Mobilisation Order was given by the German Empire's Minister of War, von Falkenhayn, at 5 p.m. on **August 2**, Germany being the last of the four Great Continental Powers to mobilise.

France

France had announced partial mobilisation on July 29th. French cavalry regiments had taken up war positions on the German frontier by the 31st, and further mounted troops were brought by train early the next morning, before official full mobilisation was announced. The Russian Military attaché in Paris reported by telegram to St. Petersburg at 1 a.m. on August 1st: "The French War Minister informed me, in great spirits, that his Government are firmly determined on war, and begged me to endorse the hope of the French General Staff that all our efforts will be directed against Germany, and that Austria will be treated as a *quantité négligeable*." France ordered full mobilisation the same day. The German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, von Jagow, urgently telegraphed his Ambassador at Paris: "We want and contemplate no hostile action against France, despite their mobilisation. We are speaking with [England's] Sir Edward Grey and shall keep you informed".

Meanwhile, President Poincaré advised the Russian Ambassador, Isvolsky, at 11 p.m., that because of France's Constitution it was necessary to obtain the consent of Parliament before war could be declared, and at least two days would be required to summon a meeting of the Chamber. He said, therefore, that it would be better if the declaration of war were made by Germany. However, given that France had mobilised against Germany, and already sent large formations to the frontier, a Declaration of War between them was now purely a matter of form, as in the previous three days French detachments had crossed the frontiers about 56 times. In addition French airmen had dropped bombs on the railway at Karlsruhe and Nuremberg on August 2, and these violations were mentioned in the German Declaration of War against France by telegram at 6 p.m. on August 3.

Belgium

On July 29, German State Secretary von Jago formally communicated Germany's proposals in case of war to the German Ambassador in Brussels for submission to the Royal Belgian Government.^[135] The Ambassador replied to the Foreign Office in Berlin on August 3 when he confirmed he had served the German Government's further note of August 2, delivered at 8 p.m., that "according to reliable information French forces intend to march on the Meuse via Givet and Namur, and that Belgium, in spite of the best intentions, would not be in a position to repulse, without assistance, any advance of French troops. The German Government would consider itself compelled to anticipate this attack and to violate Belgian territory. The German Government urged the Royal Belgian Government to assist the friendly passage of German troops to meet the French and that if the Belgians refused and put up a fight they will be considered an enemy. We emphasise that Germany had no hostile intentions of any sort towards Belgium. Germany would evacuate immediately peace was declared and that they would offer Belgium generous compensation." This was declined by the Belgian government.^[136]

On August 3rd, at 11 a.m., mobilisation orders were issued in **Great Britain**, as France had [falsely] reported that Belgian neutrality had been violated. Belgium's neutrality *was* subsequently violated, at 6 a.m. on August 4th, by the German advance heading towards Paris, and this brought the British Empire into the war as a 'defender' of Belgium. With this, five of the six European powers were now involved in the largest continental European conflict since the Napoleonic Wars.

Italy

It became clear almost from the day of the assassination that the Italians would not support their Allies in the 5th Treaty of the Triple Alliance, signed by all contracting parties at Vienna on 5th December 1912.^[137] This is evidenced in numerous telegrams from the German Ambassador at Rome, von Flotow, to the Foreign Office in Berlin where he reported Italy was attempting to raise hair-splitting issues of nationality and International Law regarding the actual assassination, and citing "the deep-seated convictions of the Italian people to liberal principles."^[138] The Italian Secretary of State, the Marquis di San Giuliano, said on July 16th that he saw "so many dark clouds on the horizon of Austro-Italian relations"^[139], and that "Serbia's nationalist strivings cannot be suppressed."^[140] On 24 July the Italian Prime Minister, Salandra, and San Giuliano told the German Ambassador that they felt Austria's actions against Serbia were incompatible with Article 7 of the *Triple Alliance* and did not consider herself committed.^[141]

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- Geiss, Imanuel, *July 1914 - The Outbreak of the 1st World War: selected documents*, London, 1967. The author is an established left-wing pro-Fischer historian who is very anti-Imperialist etc. So "selected documents" means the ones that he wants you to see. Most can be found in the "Kautsky Documents".
- The famous coloured books of the various governments are absolutely essential reading. The most notorious are the Allied ones which are "selected" and so they are notable for what was left out as much as what appears. The American Association for International Conciliation in New York were responsible for bringing these books to the public before the USA entered the war. They are verbatim publications. Important are:
 - *The German White Book*, (issued by the German Government August 1914, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1914.)
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- *Official Documents Bearing upon the European War*, no.96, Series XI: (1)US Secretary Bryan's Letter to Senator Stone regarding charges of partiality shown to Great Britain, 20th January 1915.(2)The Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs to US Ambassador Penfield, 29th June 1915. (3)The US Secretary of State to Ambassador Penfield, 12th August 1915.
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See also

- World War One
- Treaty of Versailles
- Causes of World War II

External links

- And the War Came (<https://codoh.com/library/document/and-the-war-came/en/>)
- The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914 (<https://codoh.com/library/document/the-sleepwalkers-how-europe-went-to-war-in-1914/en/>)
- Causes of World War I (Indiana Department of Education) (<https://www.in.gov/doe/files/guide.pdf>)

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104. Fabre-Luce, 1926, pps:24, 51-3.
105. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.130-1, no.71.
106. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.372, no.441.
107. Owen, 1927, pps:122-136.
108. *The German White Book* 1924, 2018 reprint.
109. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.144-5, no.92.
110. *War 1914*, 1915/1999, p.15, telegraphic report to Sir Edward Grey in London dated July 22nd.
111. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.156, no.116.
112. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.153, telegram no.107.
113. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.164, telegram no.123.
114. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.166, telegram no.126.
115. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.162-3, no.121.
116. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.360, no.420.
117. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.174, no.142.
118. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.222, no.219.
119. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.237, no.246.
120. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.428, no.535
121. *The Serbian Blue Book*, published May 1915.
122. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.283, no.311
123. *Serbian Blue Book*, published May 1915, Minute of Dr.Spalaikovitch, Serbian Ambassador to Russia of 28 July, p.30.
124. *The Russian Origins of the First World War* by Sean McMeekin, Harvard University Press & London, 2011, p.26.
125. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.393, no.476
126. *The Austrian Red Book* April 1915.
127. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, pps: 303 & 347, nos.343 & 300.
128. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.391, no.473
129. Cited by Fabre-Luce, 1926, p.52.
130. *The German White Book*, English translation, issued by the German Government August 1914, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1914, Appendixes, Exhibit 24.
131. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.400, no.482.
132. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, pps: 395 & 409, nos.479 & 499.
133. Laws of War:Opening of Hostilities (Hague III); October 18, 1907, Article 1.
134. In accordance with the Hague Convention (III) requirements regarding declarations of war: "The Contracting Powers recognize that hostilities between themselves must not commence without previous and explicit warning, in the form either of a reasoned declaration of war **or** of *an ultimatum with conditional declaration of war*".
135. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.330-1, no.376

136. Gustav Stresemann later stated: "When Frederick The Great began the first Silesian War, he marched through Saxony, and some historians have questioned whether that was not a breach of neutrality. But before he put his troops in motion, all the Courts of Europe had received his *memorandum* on his right of transit: not his excuses for his breach of neutrality." Speech to the Reichstag 14 Dec 1925, cited in *What They Said At The Time* by K.Freeman, D.Litt., London, 1945, p.38.
137. Fay, 1928, vol.ii, pps:547-551, Treaty given in full.
138. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.106, no.42.
139. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.125, no.64.
140. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.159, no.120.
141. Schucking & Montgelas, 1924, p.183, no.156.

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